

"England's Greatness"

ANNIVERSARY SERMON

delivered to the members of

ST. GEORGE'S SOCIETY OF OTTAWA

AND THE

SONS OF ENGLAND

BY

Rev. Dr. Herridge,

One of the Chaplains of the Society

St Andrew's Church, Ottawa, April 23rd 1899

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REYNOLDS' PRINT.

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On the evening of St. George's day, April 23rd, 1899, the members of the St. George's Society of Ottawa, and the Sons of England, attended Divine service in St. Andrew's Church when the anniversary sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Herridge, pastor of St. Andrew's Church, and one of the chaplains of St. George's Society.

Rev. Dr. Herridge took for his text Psalm 60.12:

"Through God we shall do valiantly."

Your presence here this evening may be taken as an evidence that you recognize in religion a factor of national greatness. I would fain believe that it means even more than this. It may be good to acknowledge in any way the power of God, and to discern the presence of an invisible Ruler behind earth's shifting affairs. But Christian philosophy teaches us to worship not some far-off Being who is separate from the world, but a Father whose life is to be illustrated in some measure in His children, and whose praise is to be sung by the devotion of grateful and obedient hearts. It is not simply that He is an important element in human events, but that He is the source of all strength, the fountain of all purity, the guide to all perfection. The problems of statecraft are ethical. So far from finding a solution in the dictates of selfishness or the caprice of expediency, they are to be dealt with only in the light of those principles of truth which are immutable as Him who made the earth and the heavens, and formed man in His image. Amid the tyrannies of base passion, the outcries of popular tumult, the blindness of ignorance, the inflation of pride, the lust of self-aggrandisement, a great voice speaks as it did to Israel: "See that thou make all things after the pattern that was shown thee in the Mount!"

Your presence here is a further evidence that you recognize in Christianity itself something greater than any modes in which it finds manifestation. I pray for the unity of the church of Jesus Christ, but I see no reason to desire

its uniformity. As long as men are different, they will be sure to illustrate in different ways their religious instincts. The mischief does not arise from the fact that there are various forms of ritual and doctrine, but that they have been so often made the pretext for intolerant bigotry. If you can stop men thinking for themselves, if you can content their spirits with a dull routine of ceremonial, if you can succeed in encasing the new wine of the kingdom of heaven in the old bottles of severe formalism or effete superstition, then you may behold the spectacle of a church at rest in mummified rigidity, but the life forever gone. Let us welcome every sign of earnest individual thought on the great questions of religion, let us not be afraid of differences in creed and church government; but as Christians, nay, as intelligent men, let us learn to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

A large number of the members of St. George's Society are members also of the Church of England. If that is the only true church, you undergo the risk of contamination, and are guilty of, at least, a venial fault in coming here this evening. But I think I am justified in assuming that your consciences do not upbraid you. Some of us are Presbyterians, but I hope we are Christians too, and it is in the name of the common Lord and Master of us all that we welcome you here to-day.

The Church of England is one to which any man may be proud to belong. Her record, for the most part, is that of allegiance to truth, and faithfulness to duty. More than once has she checked the irreligious forces which threatened to overthrow the national bulwark; and I should regard any attempt at her disestablishment in the old land as a great calamity. At the same time, while a State Church, if she is loyal to her mission, may do a great deal, it is impossible for her to do everything. No one but a bigot will deny that there is some good in English Nonconformity, that it has served to illustrate the value of some truths which have been ignored or forgotten, and has often proved a stimulus to the established church herself in illustrating the principles of genuine Christianity. No government has power to dictate to any free people how they shall worship God, nor the right to visit them with any disabilities whatever their mode of doing so. If dissent is exposed, as it is sometimes is, to the perils of fanaticism and vulgarity, an established church has also constant need to guard against machine-like habit, against formal repose, against airs of Pharisaic intolerance.

England is passing through what must be regarded, in

many ways, as a religious crisis. It has been one of the glories of the Church of England that, while she could not accomplish the impossibility of including all Englishmen in her membership, she has been broad enough to embrace a great variety of belief and opinion. It would be a mischievous thing if she indulged now in the thankless task of mutual recrimination. There ought to be still room within her borders for High Church and Low Church, for the utmost development of ritual consistent with common sense, and for the fullest illustration of the evangelical spirit. Nor must it be supposed that the two movements exclude each other. Given the true fervour of a disciple of Jesus, and what matters it, after all, whether he affects Church millinery or seems indifferent to it; whether he chants his prayers or speaks them; whether he prefers candles or electric light? Let him take his choice, but whatever it is, let him not identify religion with his particular mode of worship nor look with darkening frown upon those who differ from him as though they could scarcely be Christians at all. It may appear for a time as if truth was profited by the triumph of this or that party; but its permanent welfare is secured only by the self-respecting yet harmonious action of them all. I do not know how it seems to you, but, if I may be permitted to speak on the question, it seems to me that the problems now vexing the Church of England will not be solved by tedious controversy nor bitter invective, but by that wise and reverent thought which discerns beneath every form of worship the spirit which alone gives strength to Christianity, and indicates the true mode of Church expansion. If the signs of the times teach us anything they teach us this at least, that the hour is past for narrow bigotry, for proud intolerance, for mediæval inquisition; that while we ought to have a reason for the faith that is in us, we ought also to respect the faiths of others; that every true disciple of Jesus Christ though he may differ from us ever so widely, is to be welcomed as a friend, and treated as a brother.

We have abundant reason to rejoice in the glorious inheritance of the Englishman. The faults of John Bull are the faults of a strong, bold, and self-reliant character. His virtues are the outgrowth of long centuries filled with the records of heroic valor, of patient industry, of growing intelligence, of social and political achievement. As a matter of fact, there are many Englands. There is the England of commerce which hums like a busy hive of bees, which sends its products to the remotest parts of the world, and receives in turn from almost every quarter. There is the

England of literature, from Chaucer down to the illustrious band whose names grace the annals of Queen Victoria, bequeathing to all who love high thought and fine imagination, a domain of wealth far more valuable than gold. There is the England celebrated in song and story, the England of Cressy and Agincourt, of Balaklava and Waterloo, the England of fire and sword, not altogether attractive at times to look upon, mingling right with wrong in her bloody strifes, yet never wanting in the reckless courage which goes so far to make a man.

But there is another England, the greatest of them all. The England whose glory shines through every cloud which has darkened her horizon, the waves of whose benign influence have laved the shores of far-off realms, is the England of the martyrs, the philanthropists, the heralds of the truth,

“Who have kept to their faith unseduced by the prize
which the world holds on high,

Who have dared for a good cause to suffer, resist, fight, if
need be, to die.”

It is the England of the men who fear God and work righteousness; the England of quiet homes and open Bibles and sanctuaries of praise and prayer; the England where unselfish spirits have flung themselves into the conflict for civil and religious liberty; the England where saints and heroes have toiled to make life broader and more beautiful, and to stir up those grand enthusiasms which turn this earth into a province of the Kingdom of Heaven;

Yes, through God we shall do valiantly. I know there are prophets of evil who tell us that Britain has now reached the extreme limit of her renown, and that henceforth, like the great nations of antiquity, she must gradually settle into decay. But when was it that the handwriting of doom appeared upon the palace wall announcing the overthrow of the most splendid of the ancient monarchies? Was it not when the cup of her iniquity was full, and the proud, licentious revellers, exulting in a fool's paradise, had bid defiance alike to the laws of Nature and the laws of God? No civilization can long endure when it harbours the demons of vice and selfishness. If patriotism be nothing more than a mere tribal prejudice fostered by diplomatic trickery and the carnage of battle, it is scarcely worth preserving at all. But Christian patriotism, while it throbs with the dear love of Fatherland, and is stirred to its profoundest depths by the memory of her achievement, looks well to the broader mission entrusted to its care, and

out of its reverence for home and country, finds a starting point for beneficent sympathies which embrace the world.

Let us be thankful that amid all the progress of Queen Victoria's Reign, its conspicuous glory is of a distinctly moral character. It has witnessed the most vigorous attempts to improve the condition of the poor, and to root out those hideous vices which sap the foundations of national greatness. Its wise economic reforms, and its immense strides in matters of education have done more than we can conceive to elevate the general standard of life. It is the birthtime of those splendid missionary enterprises which are full of the heroism of noble faith and patient effort to bring into the dark places of the earth the light of Christ's glorious Gospel. It is true, indeed, that we have not yet reached the ideal of a Christian people fearing God and working righteousness; that we are startled at times by the revelations of crime in high places; that "the bitter cry of outcast London" has not quite died away into silence. St George has yet to kill the dragon of vice and intemperance and material greed, and the sword of the spirit can never be sheathed until the victory is won. If we ignore the secret of the best triumphs of the past, if we grow careless of justice and of truth, if mammon usurp the throne of Jehovah, then, perhaps, the time will come when the sceptre shall have passed away from England, and the renown of former days shall linger only as a haunting testimony to the completeness of the national overthrow. Yes, we have our perils as well as our opportunities.

"Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget!"

But while we are Englishmen, I hope we are first of all Canadians. It is natural that we should cherish an affectionate regard even for the soil of the mother country. "Oh, to be in England now that April's there," to wander among the hills of Cumberland or through the Lake District, or across the downs of Devon, or to be carried on the tide of thronging life in the world's great metropolis. It is natural that we should recall with a thrill of pride the chivalrous annals with which the sons of Britain have marked the page of history. For though it is but a little island, wrapped in the mists of the northern seas, the girdle of its empire goes round the globe. The Anglo-Saxon has always proved himself fit for transmigration, and well qualified to display under far-off skies the characteristics which

he has been taught at home. Britain keeps perpetual youth through the vitality which she has infused into her wide-spread dominions, and the same strong pulse of patriotic sentiment surges through them all. Nor let it be thought that sentiment counts for nothing. Underneath what may seem at times conflicting interests, it forms a golden chain of unity. It bids us remember the stirring events of the past, it bids us discern what is noblest in the present, it bids us anticipate the still more glorious possibilities of the future. We stand to day with tens of millions of our fellow-subjects in India, in Australia, in Africa, in scattered islands of the sea, under the protection of the same broad flag, rejoicing in the same rights and liberties, and it would be strange, indeed, if we did not catch the contagion of an Imperial spirit which goes deeper than any question of commerce or politics; and binds us into a federation of loyal and devoted hearts.

As Englishmen in Canada we have reason to be proud of our share in such a rich inheritance. Great in its extent and in its varied resources, it is not easy to overrate its destiny if it is filled by an honest, intelligent and God-fearing population. We are not vexed with the problems occasioned by the congested life of some older countries. We are not handicapped by many mistakes, nor fettered by iron precedent. The material before us is plastic, and our hands may mould it into almost any shape we will. There should be no place amongst us for social prejudice or political greed or religious bigotry. We enjoy in this land a practical self-government, and yet we are not divorced from the stimulating associations which belong to British subjects, throughout the world. We are part of a vast Empire, and at the same time we are able to realize the most attractive features of intelligent democracy. We have no State Church, and we are far better without one. Each is alike in the eye of the law, and each must stand or fall upon its merits. The only rivalry that can be defended is a rivalry in zeal and practical effectiveness. Ecclesiastical assumption may be tolerated elsewhere, but it is contrary to our genius as a people, and any strut of false pride amongst us will only be laughed at and despised. It will be our reproach if we cannot distinguish between statesmanship and the petty intrigue of some selfish partisan; if we cannot live together as Catholic and Protestant, French and English, without discerning how much smaller are the things upon which we differ than those upon which we are all agreed, and how foolish, therefore, is fierce polemic concerning race or doctrine, in view of the common task

which lies before every one of us, the furtherance of those things which best promote the peace, the welfare, the enduring renown of this our great Dominion.

I ask you, then, sons of St. George and Merrie England, to join with your brothers of St. Andrew and St. Patrick in the best enterprises of Canadian patriotism, and to wipe out the remembrance of past or present differences in the old world by the fervour of a common love for this new world, which is your home. I ask you to welcome those who come amongst us from any quarter, provided they are likely to furnish the material for industrious and law-abiding citizens, and to do your part in meeting the perils of our western settlements by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I ask you, while you venerate that flag which has braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze, to rejoice in any signs of growing friendship among the nations of the earth, and especially to recognize the essential harmony in the interests and the mission of every branch of the Anglo-Saxon race. Inspiring as are the annals of Britain in the century now drawing to a close, the dawn of the next one may witness still more glorious things, if we, and all the other subjects of our gracious Queen prove loyal to the highest trust committed to us, and strive to preserve inviolate, throughout her borders, a Christian faith and a Christian purity.

